

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT OFFICE²
Majuro, Marshall Islands 96960

TTPI

To : District Administrator, Marshalls DATE: April 5, 1974
Thru : District Director Public Affairs, Marshalls _____
From : Community Development Advisor, Marshalls
Subject: Background Information Paper, Bikini Situation

1. The above titled paper is herewith submitted, attached, per your verbal request. It is, as you said, to be used to supply information for an official Trust Territory press release.

2. The paper itself is obviously too long for a press release. However I could not condense it and include all pertinent and useful information. The paper can be used as basic information for those involved in the Bikini rehabilitation.

3. I have tried to make an objective and factual presentation. I believe that I have succeeded. I have not attempted to evaluate or analyze the situation. This is not called for in a presentation of this kind.

Those who read this paper will be able to draw their own conclusions from the data presented.

4. I have not discussed the political problems, the question of the Iroij lablab on Bikini. It is not germane to a press release and you are well of the problem and its implications. Nor have I discussed the critical attitudes of the Bikini people toward the Bikini Construction Project. I am not well enough informed to evaluate this situation. Again, you are well aware of this problem. And, I am sure that this would not be included in a Trust Territory press release. IMPERIAL

For the same reasons I have not discussed the ambivalent attitude of the Bikini leaders toward returning to Bikini next month.

5. I hope that the paper will be of use to you, your staff, and the officials at headquarters who are involved in the Bikini program.

6. The data contained in the paper came from my previous written reports, unpublished field trip notes, and personal information based on interviews and personal observations.

Jack A. Tobin



cc File

Attach: As Stated

BACKGROUND INFORMATION PAPER—THE BIKINI SITUATION

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MARSHALL ISLANDS DISTRICT

MAJURO, MARSHALL ISLANDS
April 5, 1974

BACKGROUND INFORMATION PAPER- BIKINI SITUATION

Brief Historical Background

The Bikini people had lived on their large atoll for many generations. They and their fellow Marshallese came under the domination of foreigners less than one hundred years ago. The German regime was succeeded by that of the Japanese at the onset of World War I. The Japanese rule was terminated by the American forces during World War II.

Contact with the Outside World

The people of Bikini were not the isolated twentieth century "Stone Age primitives" as described by sensationalist news reporters and other journalists at the time of first Atomic Bomb tests. They were and are, however, less sophisticated than other more acculturated Marshallese, but they had been in contact with the rest of the Marshall Islands, and had been exposed to at least some of the aspects of Western culture.

Every two months a Japanese schooner visited Bikini to purchase copra and to sell food, clothing, and other goods. Every six months a Japanese official made a visit to the atoll. Some of the Bikini people visited other atolls, married out, and attended school elsewhere in the Marshalls. Other Marshallese visited Bikini.

The small Bikini community had developed a close in-group feeling during the years of relative isolation prior to the coming of the white man and found satisfaction and security in their closely knit personal relationships and communal life.

World War II and the Bikini People

The Bikini people were directly affected by World War II in that three of their young men who had been attending the Japanese government school on Jaluit Atoll were drafted as laborers and sent to Enewetak Atoll. They were later killed there in the American bombing and bombardment of that huge and important Japanese military base. There were only six Japanese soldiers on Bikini, however wireless station operators also manned the ammunition stores. These men were all killed by American bombing and shelling. Little damage was done to Bikini however and the Bikini people were much better off than Marshallese in areas such as Jaluit, Enewetak, and Kwajalein where heavy fighting occurred.

The Bikini people suffered as did the other Marshallese, from the cut-off of supply lines from Japan, with the resultant cessation of imports of necessary consumer goods and exportation of copra.

Communications were restored and wartime hardships were alleviated when the American armed forces captured the Marshall Islands early in 1944. The serious hardships of the Bikini people were yet to come however.

Evacuation of Bikini

Early in 1946 it was decided by the United States military and Atomic Energy Commission that Bikini Atoll was the most suitable and convenient location for the testing of atomic weapons. The Bikini people were told that their atoll would be needed for these activities. They were "asked" to leave and, as might have been expected of a people of their historical conditioning to obedience, especially after more than a quarter of a century of autocratic Japanese rule, they agreed to leave their ancestral home.

The possibilities of resettlement in the Marshalls were very limited because land is scarce (only about 74 square miles) and very little of it is available for settlement. The Marshallese jealously guard their land rights and will not willingly part with them.

Problems of Resettlement

The 166 Bikinians were offered the choice of moving to either Ujae, Lae, or Rongerik, all atolls in the northwestern Marshalls. Ujae and Lae were already regularly inhabited, but Rongerik was only exploited by the people of neighboring Rongelap Atoll, who had land rights on the atoll. These people visited Rongerik to make copra, to fish, and to gather other foods. For this reason, presumably, as well as the fact that it was the closest to Bikini, the Bikini people opted to go to ~~Rongerik~~ rather than Ujae or Lae.

A village was built on Rongerik by Navy Seabees and a group of Bikini men; and all of the Bikini people were moved to that atoll on March 6, 1946. Rongerik has a dry land area of only 0.65 square miles, scattered over approximately 17 islands. It has a lagoon area of 55.38 square miles. This is much smaller than the 2.32 square mile land area and the 229.40 square mile lagoon area of Bikini Atoll, with its 36 islands.

The attempt to settle on Rongerik was a failure, allegedly due to the insufficient natural resources. A Board of Investigation convened by the Navy on June 2, 1947, recommended that the displaced Bikinians be moved again.

The Bikinians through their Magistrate "King" Juda, as ^{he was} erroneously christened by romantically minded newsmen, accompanied by three other leaders (alab) of Bikini, inspected Rongerik, Killi Island, Ujilang, Wotho and Ujae.

Wotto and Ujae to try to find a suitable place in which to relocate their people. The Bikini people were interested in getting back to their ancestral home as rapidly as possible and had allegedly regarded the past and the future resettlements as only temporary.

The period from June 2, 1947 to September 1, 1947 was spent in inspecting these possible resettlement areas. On August 26, 1947 the council of the ex-Bikini people on Rongerik sent the following letter to the American authorities:

(translation) "To the Office at Kwajalein:
Gentlement: We the council have held a meeting to find the best place to go to. We have been to some other places to inspect and have considered them. In moving we find it quite a problem. The place we all agreed to stay on is Rongerik Atoll.
s/We, The Council."

It was obvious that the Bikini leaders refused to accept the fact that they would not be allowed to return to Bikini some day, and for that reason preferred to suffer the hardships of neighboring Rongerik to a new move, in hope of being able to return to their ancestral home.

It was decided however by the American authorities that the best interests of the Bikini people would be served by transferring them to Ujilang Atoll, the westernmost of the Marshalls. Ujilang belonged to the U.S. government as heir to the Imperial Japanese government which had seized it from its former German owners, who had "purchased" the tiny atoll from its former chief.

A group of Bikini men and Navy Seabees arrived on Ujilang in later November to prepare a village for another resettlement attempt. Shortly

after their arrival an announcement was made that the atoll of Enewetak, west of Bikini, and northeast of Ujilang, would be commandeered as another testing ground for atomic weapons. It was then decided that the Enewetak inhabitants would be resettled on Ujilang. This left the ex-Bikini people right where they were six months earlier, but undoubtedly with increased feelings of insecurity, frustration, and general bewilderment.

In January of 1948 a field investigation of the problem was made by an anthropologist from the University of Hawaii at the request of the Navy. He found among other things that the relocated Bikinians were suffering serious hardships on Rongerik, and, despite a well-organized communal organization, were not getting enough to eat. He recommended that the ex-Bikini people be moved ~~to~~ another location.

Sojourn on Kwajalein

Upon the basis of the investigation and recommendation, the ex-Bikinians were again moved, to a temporary location on Kwajalein Island in the middle of March, 1948. Here, in a "tent city" in the midst of Marshallese workers from far and wide, as well as thousands of American members of the armed forces, the wandering Bikinians awaited the next move. Once again a tour of inspection was made of available and possible locations for resettlement. The possibilities finally narrowed down to Wotto Atoll, which was populated, and the single island of Killi in the southern Marshalls. Killi was not populated and was U.S. government property.

The majority of the Bikini people allegedly voted for Killi as against Wotto, and in early November of 1948 the 184 Bikinians were transferred to Killi Island.¹

¹ The increase in population was caused by the addition of Bikinians who had married out, plus their spouses and offspring.

It appears, in retrospect, that the possibilities of suitable locations for resettlement were not examined as exhaustively as they might have been. Killi was a mistake.

Killi Island

The new home of the Bikini people is a low single coral island about one and one-half miles long, on an axis of 063 degrees true. And is approximately three-fourths of a mile wide at its widest point. The extent of the land area is only 0.36 square miles, with no lagoon area, and with a very narrow fringing reef. This compares very unfavorably, of course, with the 2.32 square miles of dry land area, the 229.40 square miles of lagoon area, and the large reef areas of Bikini Atoll.

Killi was "purchased" by German traders from the local chiefs and was operated as a commercial copra plantation by the Germans. The title to the island was transferred to the Japanese government when the Japanese seized the Marshalls in 1914. It was leased to a Japanese company and operated as a copra plantation until 1940. There were allegedly not more than about thirty Marshallese laborers working on the plantation at a time. Food was brought in from Jaluit Atoll, about thirty miles to the northeast. Chickens and swine were raised to supplement the imported foodstuffs. A small number of breadfruit trees were planted and used, but the island was primarily a copra plantation. Killi passed into the hands of the United States government following World War II, and the few remaining plantation workers were evacuated.

Killi, lying as it does in the southern Marshalls, enjoys a heavy rainfall and has rich and deep soil, for the Marshalls. Most of the island, 198.04 acres, have been planted in coconut palms (191.17 acres). A taro patch area

occupies the center of the island to the extent of 4.25 acres. There are a number of bearing breadfruit trees,² some edible pandanus, as well as limited numbers of banana, papaia, and pumpkin plantings.

Unfortunately, the lack of a lagoon or protected anchorage presents very serious problems to the inhabitants of Killi. The unfavorable axis of the island (063-240 degrees) in relation to the prevailing northeast trade winds and the shelving and narrow reef, are factors which cause the island to be isolated during many months of the year. From December through March the equatorial front lies to the south, and northeasterly winds prevail. From November into late March it is possible to get a boat ashore only during a few very brief periods, because of the large breakers which crash against the rocky beaches. Copra cannot be loaded and trade goods cannot be off-loaded. These unfavorable surf conditions naturally prevent utilization of the important marine resources for food, which are, at best, infinitely poorer than those of the atoll of Bikini.

The Resettlement on Killi

The ex-Bikini people apparently experienced difficulty in adjusting to Killi from almost the very beginning. This was due in part to the different ecological conditions. The change from an atoll existence where marine resources were abundant and the lagoon and land areas stretched away as far as the eye could see and beyond, to a small isolated island without a lagoon, and without the rich marine resources which are found in an atoll environment, was drastic. The psychological attitude toward Killi was, and has continued to be of vital importance in the lack of adjustment. The refusal

² A serious breadfruit blight has destroyed many of the trees on Killi and remains unchecked. A method of controlling this menace has apparently not yet been found.

to accept the move to Killi as final and desirable has prevented adjustment to the island.

There is no doubt that the complaints of the ex-Bikini people on Killi have been valid. Conditions are certainly unfavorable. There are periods when the island is isolated and the people are very short of food. There is no doubt that Killi could support a smaller population, if the island could be supplied adequately from the outside world. However, the only solution acceptable to the former Bikinians, as a whole, is to return them to Bikini.

Attempts to Aid in the Adjustment Process

The Administration of the Trust Territory made various efforts to assist the relocated Bikinians to make a successful adjustment to Killi. A fifty-foot schooner was purchased and turned over to the group. This was to be used to supply the island in addition to the regular field trip ship stops. The craft was soon lost in the surf due to mishandling by the inexperienced crew. A second craft was provided several years later. This was a great help but was lost in a typhoon that swept through the southern Marshalls in early January of 1958. Government land was provided for the use of the Killi people on the neighboring atoll of Jaluit. Several acres on Jabwor Island were used as a village area. Houses, a warehouse, and other useful structures were erected by the government. These were to be used by the members of the Killi boat crew and others while the craft anchored off Jabwor. Three smaller islands were provided from which the Killi residents of Jabwor could obtain coconuts, pandanus and other local foods. The typhoon wiped out the village on Jabwor and the few Killi people there left the atoll for good.

A community development project had been set up on Killi to assist the people to develop and exploit the resources of the island to the maximum extent. Handicraft production was stimulated. The production of the now famous Killi Bags has continued but other items are no longer made for export.

Attempts were made to exploit the large taro patch area as a source of food and possible cash income. Two taro lifts were made by ship to Kusaie Island in the Ponape District. Large quantities of high quality taro plants were obtained and planted on Killi. A Kusaian taro expert was hired to supervise the project and to teach proper methods of cultivation.

It soon became obvious that the former Bikinians, to whom taro was a very minor and unimportant item, were not interested in cultivating this useful plant. (It should be noted that taro cultivation is becoming increasingly of less importance in the Marshalls, even in those areas in the southern Marshalls where taro once flourished). The taro patch on Killi was ruined by the typhoon of 1958. Wave action flooded the area with salt water. This killed the few plants which were left and adversely affected the fresh water lens.

The Community Development Project on Killi was terminated some time after the typhoon. It was not continued by the community.

The economic difficulties of the former Bikini people were alleviated somewhat when they were paid the sum of \$325,000 in 1956 in exchange for the use of Bikini Atoll. This was the first cash compensation paid the former inhabitants of Bikini since their removal more than ten years previously.

The interest from the Trust Fund into which \$300,000 was placed provides an income of only a few dollars a year for each of the Bikinians. This will become even less significant as the population increases as is inevitable. This inadequacy has been the reason for much of the dissatisfaction and bitterness felt by many of the former Bikini inhabitants today. These feelings and attitudes have been tremendously increased by the ex gratia payment of \$1,020,000. to the former Enwetak people in 1969.

The Bikini exiles feel that they should receive equal treatment inasmuch as they were also removed from their atoll. They have petitioned for additional financial help, but to no avail. A Bikini delegation is in Washington at this writing to attempt to obtain additional monies from the U.S. government.

The Interim Period

Following the typhoon of 1958 life continued on Killi in its usual uneventful way. The routine of daily living, copra making, food gathering, fishing when possible, and the like was only interrupted by the infrequent visits of the field trip ships, and a few visitors from the outside world.

The logistic^{AND OTHER} problems and the yearning to return to Bikini, and the hope, never abandoned, that this might be possible some day remained.

The testing of nuclear weapons ceased on Bikini and the ravaged atoll was abandoned by man.

Prelude to Return to Bikini

On August 12, 1968 the portentous announcement was made by President Johnson that Bikini would no longer be needed for the nuclear weapons testing program and that the atoll would be returned to its former inhabitants.

The Bikini people had hoped and prayed for this day for over twenty years.

The announcement was the culmination of a prolonged period of radiological and biological surveys by the Atomic Energy Commission, and a specific study in 1967 to determine whether the atoll was safe for human habitation.

The experts found that Bikini Island and Eneu Island, the largest in the atoll, were safe for human habitation and exploitation. The other smaller islands can be visited, they stated, but are not yet safe for permanent habitation. (It was later determined by the AEC experts that the smaller islands of Aerköj, Aerköj-Loll, and Bikidrin in the southern part of the atoll are safe for human habitation and exploitation). The restrictions on the other islands and islets remain.

A survey visit to Bikini by ship was made in later August, 1968. This was headed by the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory. And included members of his staff and of the Marshalls District staff, and representatives of the Bikini people. Representatives of the Atomic Energy Commission, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Interior also participated in this historic inspection trip.

The first leg of the trip was made to Killi where the people were told formally and officially that they would be able to return home. The plans for rehabilitating the atoll, and the radiological safety/contamination situation were explained to them.

Intensive planning for clean-up and clearing of debris and vegetation was done soon after the survey trip to Bikini. Cost estimates were developed by the AEC for this herculian task. The Trust Territory developed estimates for replanting, redevelopment, and resettlement. Other top level meetings followed, the final plans were approved and in February, 1969, the program

of the rehabilitation of Bikini Atoll began with the clean up phase.

A joint task force composed of military, AEC, contractor personnel, and a Trust Territory representative from the district landed on Eneu Island, Bikini Atoll to begin the formidable assignment of preparing the atoll for the return of its former inhabitants.

The prospect was not encouraging. A dense, almost impenetrable jungle-like growth of vegetation covered the surface of most of the islands of the atoll. Only a relatively few coconut trees remained on some of the islands. Rusted towers loomed high above the jungle which blanketed lower lying structures, and tons of debris.

The dazzling white beaches were littered with large quantities of scrap metal including rusted and deteriorated vehicles, landing craft, and machinery. It was a very depressing scene.

Certain islands had been severely damaged by the testing of nuclear weapons. Some of them had been partially destroyed, with portions missing. A few others had been reduced to sand spits or completely obliterated. The surface of many of the islands had been drastically altered. Land had been blasted away, or moved elsewhere for the construction of causeways, bunker protection, and berms.

The Cleanup Phase

The arduous task of clean up began as soon as the camp was set up. The grueling work continued through the hot summer with its heavy rains, and was completed in September.

The rusted towers and other radioactive or mechanically dangerous structures were removed with dynamite where necessary, and disposed of. Rusted equipment and other debris were cleared from the islands and reefs of the atoll. Large holes and culverts were filled and leveled. Roads were

cut around the main islands, and also from lagoon to ocean where necessary.

The large islands of Eneu and Bikini were stripped of vegetation in alternate rows in preparation for scientific, properly spaced planting of coconut trees.

The old airstrip on Eneu was cleared and prepared for the weekly supply plane which was to service the cleanup group, and for emergency air lifts in the future. The piers, which had badly deteriorated, were refurbished and made serviceable. Bunkers and buildings that could be used by the returning islanders were cleaned up and repaired.

Representatives of the Bikini people, selected by the council on Killi Island, also participated in the cleanup operation from early in the program. They assisted in the work, for which they were paid, and served in an advisory capacity as well.

These leaders expressed satisfaction with the work that had done, realization of the good potential of the atoll, and optimism for the future productivity of Bikini and its desirability as a place in which to live.

The broad lagoon, adjacent ocean, and extensive reefs of Bikini teem with marine life of many kinds. Seabirds abound, and large turtles frequent the beaches of the large atoll. All of the wildlife of Bikini is safe for human consumption, according to the AEC, except for the coconut crabs (Birgus latro). The condition of the marine life was an important factor in the optimistic attitude of the leaders. And it will obviously be a very important factor in the economy and the well being of the returnees.

Tiny Killi, as has been pointed out, without a lagoon, and with ²very limited reef area, provides very little edible marine life. Indeed, the contrast in marine resources is dramatic.

The Agricultural Rehabilitation Phase

The Agricultural Rehabilitation Phase began in November 1969, just prior to the departure of the Cleanup Task Force. The Marshall Islands District Agriculturist, and staff members, assisted by Bikini representatives prepared a large coconut nursery on Eneu Island. Selected seed nuts brought from Jaluit Atoll were planted and nurtered. These were transplanted when sprouted properly.

The second increment of seed nuts arrived on Bikini in mid-December of the same year. They were brought up on a special field trip from Jaluit and Namorik. Twenty-three Bikini men boarded the ship at Killi and accompanied the shipment of nuts to Bikini. They remained there for a period to help replant the atoll.

The islands of Bikini and Eneu were almost completely replanted in coconuts within the following years. This tremendous task, involving thousands of young trees, was completed in late December of 1973. The overwhelming majority of the trees have survived and are thriving.

Subsistence crops were also planted. Out of 300 breadfruit planted on Bikini Island 40 have survived. And 60ty pandanus plants are alive out of the 100 which were planted.

Future plans call for introducing more breadfruit and pandanus plants for Bikini and for Eneu as well.

It is also planned to plant the islands of Aerköj, Aerköj Loll, and Bikidrin with coconuts, breadfruit, and pandanus.

An all Marshallese agricultural work force remains on Bikini to maintain the plantings and to carry out the rest of the agricultural program.

Copra production will be tremendously increased on Bikini due to the scientific planting of selected nuts.

The airstrip on Eneu was not planted and will be used for medical emergency flights and possible future economic development of the community.

The atoll will not be able to support the entire population until the coconut, breadfruit, pandanus, and other food plants come into production. This will not be for a number of years. This means six to eight years for coconut trees from the time of planting, dependent upon rainfall and soil conditions. The breadfruit can be expected to bear from seven to eight years from time of planting. And the pandanus will bear from two to three years, again, under favorable growing conditions. Bikini will not be a very comfortable habitat until the trees have matured to the point where they will provide shade as well as food. Indeed, the islands will be very hot, and rather bleak in appearance until this time.

Killi Island will be the "home base" until such time as a mass return to Bikini is possible. The sum of \$95,000 was spent by the government to build new wooden homes and other facilities on Killi to make the island a more liveable place during the waiting period. The construction work was done by the residents themselves with the help of the Community Development Department.

Two locally constructed boats equipped with outboard motors were sent to Killi at this time. These were to enable the people to troll and use other fishing techniques around the island. And to offload copra and bring goods into the island more efficiently and easily.

In November, 1972 a commodity distribution program was instituted for the benefit of the Killi community. Shipments of food are sent to the island regularly to supplement their diet. This has alleviated the economic situation considerably.

The Construction Phase

With the announcement that the Bikini people would be able to return to the atoll came an official press release from the Department of Interior. This stated that a "model island community" would be constructed. A rather detailed description of a community, that included homes and all necessary municipal buildings and facilities was discussed in the press release which was widely distributed.

The High Commissioner's office gave the contract to do this construction to a Majuro based company.

House plans were drawn by the design section at headquarters, in consultation with district staff involved. One of these plans was selected by ~~the Killi Council from the several shown them on Killi~~, *Modifications of* the basic plan were made by Killi representatives later in the planning stage.

In early April of 1971 the advance party of the contractor arrived on Bikini to site up the work camp and to construct a warehouse.

Twelve members of the Killi (Bikini) Council were also on the ship. Their task was to assist the district surveyors in establishing and marking the former boundaries of the lāneage land holdings (wāto). Home and municipal building sites were also laid out and marked.

Contract TT-171-83 was signed and work on the Bikini Housing Project was started in June, 1971.

Current Status of the Housing Project

The contractor has reported that the following construction has been completed as of the end of March 1974: 40 houses, 24 water catchment-storage units, 10 cook houses, and 10 laundry houses. Prefabricated materials for further construction were shipped to Bikini at this time.

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To Return, Or Not To Return, That Is The Question

Although the Office of the High Commissioner has announced that the Bikini people will return to their home atoll "on or about May 1, 1974" there is some doubt that this will actually happen.

The Magistrate and other Killi/Bikini leaders allegedly agreed to return on April 30, 1974 as proposed by the administration. A date which perhaps will enable the High Commissioner to report the move to the next session of the United Nations Trusteeship Council.

Rumor has it that the Bikini exiles may not return at this time, or in the near future. They have, it is said, set construction of all housing that is, 80 dwelling units, and all public (municipal) buildings as a prerequisite for their return to Bikini. The representatives claim that 40 houses will not be adequate for all of the former Bikini people on Killi, about 300 or so now. (Not to mention the people claiming land rights on Bikini and living in places other than Killi, an additional 300 or more).

The success of the mission to Washington in quest of monetary aid may very well be a crucial factor in the willingness to return to Bikini.

In any event, the future is not certain as far as return to the atoll is concerned. The next few weeks or months may be decisive.

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